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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE

Some General Ethical Guidelines for  
Today's Directorate of Operations

Two seminars involving different generations of DO officers were recently sponsored by the Center<sup>1</sup> to discuss some of the attitudes towards operational patterns held today in the DO. The general objective was to see how widely shared such attitudes are, and to test opinions on including some of them in our training programs for young Case Officers. Separate papers setting forth the issues for discussion were prepared for the seminars. We found general agreement on the proposition that our most valuable and enduring operational successes stemmed from situations involving shared goals, rather than pure manipulation. The younger officers were adamant that we should not in the future recruit people for what we recognize clearly to be high-risk-to-life missions as they believed has been done in the past.

Both groups of officers shared relatively high ethical standards in connection with their professional life. They were widely divergent on whether there is an adequately functioning system to express dissent or alternative viewpoints up the line within the DO: the senior officers believing there is and the young officers vigorously disputing that view. There was also wide disagreement on the number of officials in DO leadership positions who merit emulation and on whether "used car salesmanship" is a desirable trait for DO officers. Younger officers thought it was not. Both groups were united on the value of trimming down the size of the DO and in desiring a modified system of selection out.

The two groups concluded that while there is much shared idealism and many common ethical goals among our officers across the board, it would not be wise to attempt to include

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A seminar involving nine senior officers (GS-16/18) was held on 12 March, and one involving six junior officers from age 25-35 was held on 2 April. Each session had participants from almost all of the DO divisions.

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ethical guidelines in our formal training courses; there are better and more direct, personal ways to assure high morale and esprit de corps. Several interesting suggestions for the training of young Case Officers arose from the two sessions. Attached are eight questions addressed by the two seminars and the views of the participants on each.

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1. Are there successful patterns in agent recruitments?

The senior group tended to agree that the most valuable and enduring operational success stemmed from situations in which there was a shared set of goals between the Case Officers and the agents, and that operations based on manipulation, blackmail and coercion worked less well. One of the senior group pointed out that old and discredited approaches die hard, although one of the younger officers indicated that SE Division is doing very well at steering young Case Officers away from the effort to use handles that are no longer deemed appropriate in planning recruitments.

The younger group was not in full agreement with the senior officers on this question. One noted that if a potential agent had access, the Case Officer should go after him in any way possible. One young officer spoke of gaining the cooperation of a terrorist against his own organization solely through fear of a threatened exposure by his Case Officer. Several younger officers said that a group of shared goals is desirable and will usually work better, but one noted that it is a new generation of targets the Agency is trying to recruit, covering new subject matter. Therefore, the Agency must be flexible enough to apply anything needed that will work. The United States (and the CIA) is no longer looked upon with great respect abroad and it will be increasingly hard to find goals that others share. Furthermore, good agents are not always commendable human beings who would normally share U.S. or Agency goals.

2. Should the DO use extreme ruthlessness in its operational patterns?

The younger officers generally agreed that they would not recruit any agent who would run the risk of almost certain death in serving the Agency. The [REDACTED] 25X1A [REDACTED] were cited as examples. Only one of the younger officers believed it would be morally acceptable to recruit someone running such a risk, but only under circumstances where the agent was aware of the risk involved and still was willing. Both the senior and junior officers believed that the DO treats its agents better in some respects than the Agency officers treat each other.

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3. Are there shared ethical standards among DO officers?

One member from each group indicated that there are some qualifications to the "normal" ethical standards that one must hold to be successful in DO operations. The senior officer said, "We have to recognize that 100 percent of our clandestine service activity is in effect breaking the laws of some nation." The younger officer said, "You can't be completely moral and be doing this kind of business." The latter received general agreement from his peers. In both groups there was at least one officer who believed he had to live a split personality, one in the professional world of operations and the other in his private life. Some in both groups believed that those who cannot rationalize in some way their moral standards with their professional conduct should get out or be pushed out of the DO, but there was a general rejection of across-the-board amorality. In discussing motivational patterns, it appeared that the senior group entered intelligence work because of patriotism and the then popular internationalist concepts of U.S. involvement abroad. The younger officers entered the profession to work on foreign affairs, go overseas, and to join an elite and small organization where they would be granted responsibility relatively early. They believed CIA offered them this. Despite somewhat differing motivation they appeared to share common ethical standards.

4. Is there room for dissent in the Agency?

The senior officers agreed that there was a right of dissent in the Agency which worked effectively, and that this had led to organizational loyalty which is a key ingredient that should be encouraged. They also agreed that the Agency had established a good record of following orders from the senior policy level outside the Agency. It was the Agency's record of dissent on measures being considered at the policy level which had helped us in recent congressional investigations.

The younger officers were not in agreement with their seniors on this point, even when the issue was softened, at their insistence, to "open to alternate viewpoints." One said there are many junior officers with legitimate gripes. The ideal leader who explains his reasons for his position to a disagreeing subordinate and then invites the subordinate to take the matter up the line doesn't often appear. One

officer said that this ideal works in some Divisions. Another officer said there are few critically important decisions that get turned around by objection from below. Still another said that criticism, personal initiative, and responsibility in general is de-emphasized in the DO. Criticism "rocks the boat" and endangers one's career. Another assented, saying disagreement risks bringing on the stigma of a malcontent and complainer, and that even constructive criticism is not acceptable.

Both groups agreed that the newest generation of junior officers is a more discontented lot, and neither group believed this discontent was fully justified. One younger officer said that dissent required responsibility, and another said the right of dissent does not presuppose correctness.

5. Are "careerists" (competent SOB's) prevailing in the DO?

(This question arose from one of the issues included in both the pre-seminar papers: that it is consistently the same sort of Agency officer who has hurt us when we are investigated, either by his maladroitness supervision of his employees, abuse of the prerogatives of his office, or judgmental failures of large magnitude--or a combination of the above failures. He is interested in his own advancement ahead of everything else.)

The senior group recognized that there are still careerists around, but believed that they are declining in numbers and influence. The younger officers were far less sanguine than their elders and much more critical of careerists in all parts of the DO. One said, "There are some of the most despicable men I've known in high leadership positions in the DO. They cheat the government at every turn they can, and use their position to enhance their own well-being. Then they try to tell young officers to be honest! . . . A man can be tremendously successful operationally (recruiting lots of agents) and still be a lousy human and leader for whom no one can have respect." Another said there is a large body of people who are successful through "flim-flam," and some of their bosses don't know who they are, even if their peers and subordinates do. The DO is particularly susceptible to this.

A young officer said, "There are a large number of competent SOB's at senior levels, there is a generation gap; some top leadership from my moral standpoint should not be in their positions." Another said there are more than enough of such men in this Agency, but "you find that everywhere and

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you never can rid yourself of them." It is a question of how you deal with them. The system unfortunately rewards these people. A fifth said the problem is somewhat self-perpetuating because in the DO, senior men of this type promote their own kind.

Some of the older officers had insisted, perhaps with a touch of cynicism, that what we needed to recruit in the way of young officers was "good used car salesmen." While this was not universally a view held by the senior officers, it was definitely rejected by the younger officers who believed that was the wrong type of person to bring into the DO.

6. Is a trimmed down bureaucracy good; should the DO have a selection out system?

The two groups were in agreement on this--a trimming down is good and there should be a somewhat modified selection out system. The senior officers believed there should be serious weeding out at the three-year level. This should be after one overseas tour which is the only real world in which to test the younger officers (and the junior group agreed). The older officers believed the Agency is learning to eliminate unnecessary activity and to concentrate only on the most essential things. This should winnow out the less effective and assure overseas assignments only to the most capable officers. They favored a modified selection out system and believe now, if ever, is the propitious time to install a system in which "twice passed over is out," except for those "we have carried so long that we have now a moral obligation."

The younger officers seemed to favor a selection cut, at least getting the incompetents out of the DDO, "some of whom could make fine analysts or do other work." One said we should not hesitate to stop promoting those who had reached their peak at the GS-12-14 level, even a GS-11 "street Case Officer" could continue to do good work at that grade level indefinitely. The DO should try to identify those without potential before they are 35 years old and move them before that time. One officer expressed the belief that trimming the size of the outfit was making performance more important and therefore flim-flamming more difficult to perpetuate. An idea put forth by another younger officer was that the officer of the future should

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not be of the "cold war" syndrome when energy, food, population control, and economics are major problems. This officer also suggested that promotion panels should have peer and subordinate-grade officers on them to assure that a balanced picture of the officer was received before promotion.

7. How should the DO instill general guidelines for conduct, good morale and an esprit de corps?

The two groups were in agreement that there should be no attempt to incorporate such matters into formal training programs--a move they believed would be counterproductive. One young officer who was a former marine said, "You just can't use the Marine Corps system for building morale or esprit de corps." The senior officers and the younger officers believed that examples and person-to-person informal contact were the only ways to spread these values. Several younger officers said they had received good guidance and experiences from some of their contacts with senior officers and leaders. Both groups noted that the best morale and esprit de corps can be built overseas working in close relationships with one another outside of the Washington bureaucracy.

The senior officers emphasized "organizational loyalty" as an important value which they believed existed, whereas the junior officers placed more stress on "honesty," a lack of which they strongly sensed at senior levels. There was consensus on the importance of esprit de corps but the youth did not seem to favor a "regimental history" kind of approach suggested by a senior member.

8. What should be added to DO training courses?

While no one favored teaching ethical guidelines in the formal training courses, some senior and junior officers favored raising philosophical and moral issues for occasional discussion to focus trainees upon the problems they will face and to spot and move out those who will not be able adequately to deal with such issues. Some of the younger officers begged for more frankness and candidness from the training Case Officers on what operations are really like and for a touch of the "bad" with the good "heroics." One young officer noted that there is little Agency training in interrelating with your subordinates in a supervisory sense. Training should include non-typical cases as well as the arch-typical, and trainees

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should be exposed to those who worked on such cases. There is not enough training on terrorist, drug, or technical operations. The Senior Operations Course failed, according to one younger officer, to take enough advantage of the experience of those in the course. This man said that the mid-career course's half-hour presentations by each class member was the most valuable part of the entire course. There was an appeal by another younger officer to stress professionalism and honesty only, and that high morale and esprit de corps would follow on their own.

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